

# Teaching Tolerance through the Lens of the Holocaust: The Goodwin Holocaust Museum and Education Center of South Jersey

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History

## The American Jewish Community and its Collective Memory

It was not until the 1970s that the American Jews made the Holocaust central to Jewish identity and its commemoration a priority. An increase in Holocaust awareness in the United States led the Jewish community to focus on Holocaust memorialization on a local, state, and national level. In 1973, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), founded in 1944 by the Council of Jewish Federations, an umbrella organization for local Jewish communities throughout the country, issued its first “Commemorating the Holocaust” proposal in its annual Joint Program Plan. This plan, which serves as an advisory guide to assist member agencies in their own program planning, suggested that local communities create “visual memorials to the Holocaust, such as permanent exhibits, monuments, plaques, [and] signs” and that they develop local archives. In every year since 1973 the Joint Program Plan has continued to include a section dedicated to Holocaust memorialization.<sup>1</sup> One such local Jewish community in South Jersey has commemorated their history with a Holocaust museum that they included as part of their recently-constructed community center. Its story is the focus of this paper.

The Jewish community’s decision to adopt the Holocaust, decades after the actual event, as its primary identity marker serves as an example of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ notion of “collective memory.” According to Halbwachs, present concerns determine what of the past we remember and how we remember it, rather than “the past working its will on the present.”<sup>2</sup> The French sociologist explained collective memory to be the shared memory of a group or community

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<sup>1</sup> Saidel G. Rochelle, *Never Too Late to Remember* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996), 23, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 3.

which serves to foster unity among its members. Halbwachs emphasized that a community chooses what it remembers and how it remembers past events, while recognizing that circumstances alter how these choices are made. A significant collective memory is normally tragic and once established, “comes to define [an] eternal truth, and, along with it, an eternal identity, for the members of the group.”<sup>3</sup> Of significant importance to Halbwachs was the institutionalization of collective memory, which in this case includes Holocaust institutes and Holocaust-memory professionals, whose task is to continue to center the Holocaust within the Jewish community.

The Jewish community began to focus their attention towards Holocaust awareness during the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the 1940s and 1950s in the U.S. (with the exception of the publication of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and the play based on the book), the Holocaust was only “spoken of in whispers or ignored.”<sup>5</sup> What came to be known as ‘the Holocaust’ was not even acknowledged yet by the United States and European countries as a unique event. Jewish deaths were viewed as just part of the civilian casualties of “total war.”<sup>6</sup> During this time, many Jews were too intimidated to be outspoken about any issue, let alone the Holocaust, a legacy of the continued existence of anti-Semitism in the country after 1945.<sup>7</sup> Although many Jewish intellectuals, such as ‘the New York intellectuals’ embraced the country’s anti-communist foreign policy, anti-Semitism was especially evident in the political atmosphere of the Cold War where the stereotype of Jewish ‘Bolsheviks’ persisted. In his quest to rid the country of communists, Senator Joseph McCarthy, leader of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), accused numerous people of being communists. Many of those accused during his infamous investigations were Jewish: “McCarthyism made the Jewish community especially afraid because it had a decidedly anti-Semitic cast.”<sup>8</sup>

Since collective memory is shaped by present conditions, we must, as historian Peter Novick suggests, look at those circumstances in which the Jewish community chose to make the Holocaust central to Jewish identity.<sup>9</sup> “Holocaust consciousness” rose in the 1960s in the Jewish

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<sup>3</sup> Novick, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Saidel G. Rochelle, 16-7.

<sup>5</sup> Rochelle, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Rochelle, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 52-3.

<sup>9</sup> See Novick, 5-11.

community as well as in the rest of the country as a result of events in the U.S. and Israel. In the United States, Holocaust awareness increased due to a change in American identity politics. The U.S. began to recognize its multiculturalism, where “the politics of the ‘melting pot’ shifted to an emphasis on the distinct cultural identities and historical roots of the many immigrant communities that make up the United States.”<sup>10</sup> In *Never Too Late to Remember*, Saidel Rochelle notes that this was a repercussion of John F. Kennedy’s election as the country’s first Catholic president, which “symbolized the transformation of the United States from an essentially Protestant to a religiously pluralistic society.” He argues that after the election there was a decrease in all types of prejudice including anti-Semitism.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that an increase in identity politics was, moreover, largely due to the numerous movements that sprang up during this turbulent decade that challenged the limits of liberalism, especially those involving minorities, such as the civil rights and feminist movements. As these movements became radicalized, members began to emphasize their differences rather than their commonalities as Americans and constructed their identities based on their victimization.<sup>12</sup> Thus, within this atmosphere, ethnic groups in the U.S. started to assert their own distinct identities where their victimization “either in the United States or in their countries of origin (or both)” and their ability to overcome such victimization became a powerful symbol.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the American Jewish community, like other ethnic, gender, and racial groups, centered its identity on its historic victimization.<sup>14</sup>

Events in Israel, such as Adolph Eichmann’s trial in 1961 and, according to most scholars, more importantly the 1967 Six-Day War, caused Holocaust consciousness to increase within the Jewish community.<sup>15</sup> The Six-Day War caused Jews to become anxious over the possibility of another Holocaust. Their fears were heightened by

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<sup>10</sup> Omer Bartov, “Reception and Perception: Goldhagen’s Holocaust and the World,” in Geoff Eley, ed., *The “Goldhagen Effect”* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Rochelle, 24.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the radicalization of the civil rights movement see Manning Marable’s *Race, Reform, and Rebellion* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1991). A history of the radicalization of the feminist movement can be found in Ruth Rosen’s book *The World Split Open* (New York, Penguin Books, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Bartov, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Novick, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Eichmann was a Nazi official who played a central role in the implementation of the Holocaust. For a provocative account of the trial see Hannah Arendt’s book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's claim that his goal was Israel's annihilation as well as "the indifference of Western nations" which awakened dormant memories of the Holocaust." Rochelle contends that, "though short-lived, the anxiety was intense."<sup>16</sup>

The wars between Israel and Palestine that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s caused a split among American Jews in their support of Israel. Many became disenchanted with Israel and its aggressive policies against the Palestinians. This divide deepened the already-existing fractures within the community that resulted from an increase in the number of secularized Jews in the country. In order to unite an increasingly diverse and divided American Jewry, the community embraced the Holocaust as its "consensual symbol."<sup>17</sup> Although having contentious views over Israel and whether its status was as a victim or an aggressor, members of the Jewish community maintained their communal ties through their identification as victims of the Holocaust. Moreover, non-orthodox segments of the community that sought a secular link with Judaism embraced the Holocaust as a marker of their Jewish identity.<sup>18</sup> Thus, with the emergence of identity politics in the United States and heightened violence within the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Holocaust became "the only common denominator of American Jewish identity."<sup>19</sup> American Jews therefore embraced the Holocaust as its most significant collective memory and identity marker.

As the importance of Holocaust awareness grew in the Jewish community, so too did it increase throughout the country during the 1960s with its institutionalization, including a proliferation of movies, books, college courses, and memorials. Popularization of the Holocaust culminated with the NBC miniseries "Holocaust" in 1978. In that year, President Carter became the first politician to place Holocaust memorialization on the government agenda. He created the United States Holocaust Commission with plans to establish a national Holocaust museum. Carter's actions were the result of political motivations since by this time the American Jewish community had become a prominent interest group (Carter wanted Jewish votes for the next election).<sup>20</sup> After

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<sup>16</sup> Linenthal, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Novick, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Novick argues that American Jewry's sense of victimization- although they were not directly affected by the Holocaust- comes from the shared knowledge that if their parents or grandparents had not immigrated, they would have shared the same fate of European Jewry. See 7-11; Rochelle, 29-31.

<sup>19</sup> Novick, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Rochelle, 7, 28. Although efforts to establish a national Holocaust museum began under President Carter, the United States Holocaust Museum did not officially open until April 1993.

it gained national attention, Holocaust commemoration became the focus of Jewish communities at the local level.

### **The Establishment of the Goodwin Holocaust Museum and Education Center**

During the 1980s, the Jewish community in southern New Jersey began to thrive as many families moved from Philadelphia. By 1997, 50,000 Jews lived in Camden, Burlington, and Gloucester Counties and the east side of Cherry Hill in Burlington County became “the hub of Jewish life in the three counties.”<sup>21</sup> To create a shared environment, its members invested \$18 million to establish the Katz Jewish Community Center (JCC), which opened in 1997. David Friedman, the JCC’s marketing director, claimed that the seventeen-acre campus was a “reflection of a migration that is not only physical but also spiritual.” According to Friedman, the campus served to promote Jewish identity “especially in young people in an age when popular culture and intermarriage threaten to erode it.”<sup>22</sup> The community also decided to commemorate the Holocaust by including a Holocaust museum and education program within the community center. Since the community center’s opening, the Goodwin Holocaust Museum, named after its benefactor Richard Goodwin, and its Education Center has served as a memorial whose functions are to maintain Jewish collective identity, and more importantly to commemorate and educate visitors about the Holocaust. The Goodwin Holocaust Museum and its educational programs serve as places of both remembrance and learning, primarily for students, about an incomprehensible event.

Both the JCC and its Goodwin Holocaust Museum and Education Center (GHMEC) opened in 1997. The history of the museum’s collection, however, began three decades prior. In 1965, when the American Jewish community was beginning to embrace the Holocaust as a central part of their identity, Yaacov Riz, a Holocaust survivor and school principal, created a small exhibit from his own personal collection of artifacts entitled the “Jewish Identity Center” in the basement of his Northeast Philadelphia row home. After his death, Riz’s collection was moved in 1987 to Gratz College-the oldest independent Jewish college in North America -where it was used as a museum exhibit named the

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<sup>21</sup> David O’Reilly, “A Place Where a Culture Can Thrive: A New Jewish Community Center Is Set To Open In Cherry Hill,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 June 1997, sec. South Jersey.

<sup>22</sup> O’Reilly, “A Place Where a Culture Can Thrive”.

“Holocaust Awareness Museum” under the direction of Dr. Philip Rosen, educator, author, and historian. He expanded the exhibit by adding to Riz’s artifacts and memorabilia as well as establishing a Speaker’s Bureau of survivors and liberators.<sup>23</sup>

After a few years passed, however, funding for the preservation and expansion of the exhibit became an issue. When the new Jewish Community Center in Cherry Hill was being planned, Richard Goodwin, a contractor from the area, offered to fund space for the museum in honor of his father, who had served as a captain of the U.S. Navy during WWII. Dr. Rosen agreed to move the collection to the Jewish center, seeing several advantages in doing so. First, the exhibit would be housed rent-free in a larger space. Also, Rosen believed that unlike Philadelphia, New Jersey’s Holocaust educational programs would be more centralized due to the state’s mandate regarding Holocaust education. In 1994, the New Jersey state legislature passed a bill recommending that lessons about the Holocaust and the roots of genocide be taught in all grades. Pennsylvania had no equivalent policy. Therefore, Rosen envisioned that “the museum [would] be an important part of in-service education and education in the state.”<sup>24</sup> Rosen was further enticed by the fact that Gerhard Vogel, an exhibit designer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., was acquired to help design the display cases for the new museum.<sup>25</sup> While plans for the museum were being discussed, Nelly Toll, a child who had been hidden during the Holocaust, had formed the Holocaust Resource Center in Cherry Hill with several other volunteers involved with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Southern New Jersey. The artifacts and resources from this collection were combined with Rosen’s exhibit to form the Holocaust Education Center of the Delaware Valley, and its centerpiece, the Goodwin Holocaust Museum.<sup>26</sup> Helen Kirschbaum, interviewed for this case study, is currently the head educational program coordinator of the museum.<sup>27</sup>

The GHMEC, with both commemorative and educational functions, explains that it is “dedicated to teaching [visitors] about the

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<sup>23</sup> *Holocaust Museum*, <[http://mpdn.org/goodwin/holocaust\\_museum.htm](http://mpdn.org/goodwin/holocaust_museum.htm)> (3 October 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Carol J. Suplee, “Museum Displays Holocaust Collection,” *The Cherry Hill Trend*, 1 December 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Kristin E. Holmes, “Holocaust Museum To Move To Cherry Hill From Melrose Park,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 January 1997, sec. Neighbors.

<sup>26</sup> *Holocaust Museum*, <[http://mpdn.org/goodwin/holocaust\\_museum.htm](http://mpdn.org/goodwin/holocaust_museum.htm)> (3 October 2004).

<sup>27</sup> My evaluation of the museum and its education center is based largely on several visits to the museum and with interviews I had with Helen Kirschbaum in fall 2004. I would like to thank Helen Kirschbaum for her time.

Holocaust, preserving the experience of those who survived, and honoring the memory of those who perished.”<sup>28</sup> In order to accomplish this, the education center supports numerous Holocaust programs and events including the Goodwin Holocaust Museum, which offers the largest permanent exhibition in the tri-state area. The museum has a Speaker’s Bureau of Holocaust Survivors including survivors, children of survivors, liberators, and educators who speak free of charge at schools, service organizations, and community events. The GHMEC also has an extensive Holocaust reference and lending library with multimedia resource, educational programs, events and materials, including lectures, seminars, photography and art displays; teacher workshops that are accredited to fulfill the mandate to teach the Holocaust instituted by the New Jersey Department of Education; scholarships for teacher and students to study the Holocaust, and an annual community-wide Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance) Commemoration program.<sup>29</sup>

The education center currently has contacts with about 10,000 Delaware Valley schools and teachers whose classes visit the museum annually. For schools that cannot afford to visit, the museum offers several ways teachers can educate their students about the Holocaust. For instance, the center will send information to any teacher for use in his or her class. Also, many survivors that speak to students at the museum will travel to the school for free. If schools cannot afford to send classes to see the dramatic performances that the museum offers, the center, through Kirschbaum’s efforts, is often able to attain grants to pay for the students tickets. Finally, notices are sent to teachers regarding the “Curriculum Trunk Program” run by the Florida and Houston Holocaust Museums. The museums loan the curriculum trunks to requesting schools as part of an outreach program for teachers in elementary through high school classrooms to use in the instruction of Holocaust education. The trunks, which include complete lesson plans and class activities, videos, CDs, and posters, are designed to be age-sensitive. The GHMEC serves to complement what students learn in the classroom about the Holocaust.

Since students are the museum’s primary audience members, coordinators have designed the program so that the students can relate to the Holocaust, an event that seems almost incomprehensible even to those who lived through it as well as scholars who specialize in the

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<sup>28</sup> *Holocaust Education Center of the Delaware Valley*,  
<<http://www.holocausteducationcenter.com/museum>> (25 October 2004).

<sup>29</sup> *Holocaust Education Center of the Delaware Valley*,  
<<http://www.holocausteducationcenter.com/museum>> (25 October 2004).

history of the Holocaust. Thus, the museum teaches the Holocaust's uniqueness; however, it also universalizes and simplifies the Holocaust for students, characterizing it as the definitive event among other incidents that have resulted from bigotry. Part of the museum's mission statement includes the goal for its visitors to "not just to learn of the past," but moreover, for the museum to "educate [its visitors] for the future through the lessons of the Holocaust to reduce prejudice and lessen hatred, bigotry, and violence against all groups."<sup>30</sup> Scholars have proven that visitors do "make meaning" in museums. They construct an understanding from what they see, touch, and manipulate. However, learning is more likely to occur when visitors can connect with what they already know, allowing them to make an association with what they bring to the exhibition and what is presented.<sup>31</sup> Hatred and bigotry are concepts that students understand, many probably having been subjected to or having witnessed prejudice themselves. By putting the Holocaust in this context, therefore, students do not come away thinking that the Holocaust was a distant horror that has no relevance to their lives, but as something that could potentially occur again that, through tolerance, they have the power to prevent. Kirschbaum explained that the Holocaust "was brought about by prejudice and hatred," both of which "have not been eliminated."<sup>32</sup> Coordinators have designed a Holocaust education program for students from grades three through twelve that tries to achieve "a...balance between teaching the history of the Holocaust and promoting lessons of tolerance and personal responsibility."<sup>33</sup>

The education programs that museum directors have designed are used to complement the museum exhibition to "provide student visitors with a moving and meaningful learning experience."<sup>34</sup> Coordinators have created several programs with content appropriate for different grade levels. They focus on teaching students in grades three through five about prejudice, promoting that they, as individuals, can work against hatred. Little time is spent discussing the Holocaust specifically. The main event for these children is a performance of a puppet show, entitled "The Town That Fought Hate." The story is based on the Janice Cohn book, *The*

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<sup>30</sup> *Holocaust Education Center of the Delaware Valley*, <  
<http://www.holocausteducationcenter.com/museum>> (25 October 2004).

<sup>31</sup> George E. Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 152.

<sup>32</sup> Helen Kirschbaum, interview by author, 28 October 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Jenna Berger, "Teaching History, Teaching Tolerance- Holocaust Education in Houston," *The Public*

*Historian* 25 (Fall 2003): 126.

<sup>34</sup> Berger, 126.



*Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate*, which recalls events that occurred in Billings, Montana, in 1993 that made national headlines. After a hate group harassed Jewish families who had menorahs in their windowsills, all the residents banded together and put up menorahs to resist the forces of bigotry that threatened their community. Thirty minutes is allotted after the performance for the children's questions. Students in these grades are also shown either the documentary "Nightmare" about two children that escape from the Warsaw ghetto and come to America, or an educational film entitled "Daniel's Story," based on the exhibit for children in the Washington D.C. museum.<sup>35</sup>

GHMEC coordinators focus more on the events of the Holocaust for grades six through twelve, while also emphasizing the lessons of bigotry. Because the history of the Holocaust is discussed, the coordinators strongly suggest that teachers bring their students to the museum after they have concluded their lessons on the Holocaust in the classroom. Students in these grades spend about two and a half hours at the Community Center. They first listen to a Holocaust survivor, and, in addition, students often hear from an American GI who liberated a concentration camp. The Museum coordinators feel that the use of survivor testimony is paramount in teaching children about the Holocaust. They argue that: "Documents and books describe historical facts, but eye witness testimonies are much more powerful. The real life stories of survivors and liberators make history come alive and become personal. Face to face encounters have an emotional impact that no child or adult will ever forget."<sup>36</sup>

Next, a trained volunteer gives the students a tour of the museum. All of the museum tour guides, or docents, are volunteers, many of whom are former school teachers. Their knowledge of the Holocaust differs so that Education Center coordinators train those who wish to volunteer in several ways. Coordinators give them materials to read on their own, ask them to attend in-services for teachers and listen to survivor testimonies, and pair up with experienced docents. For the most part, the docents do not follow a specific narrative or script, and use their discretion in the information that they provide depending on their audience. For instance, the docents discuss some complex issues with older students such as the anti-Semitism that existed in America at the time which served as one

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<sup>35</sup> Helen Kirschbaum, interview by author, 24 November 2004.

<sup>36</sup> *Holocaust Education Center of the Delaware Valley*, <  
<http://www.holocausteducationcenter.com/museum> > (25 October 2004).

reason among several- including the fact that the United States was suffering from the Great Depression- that Franklin Roosevelt's administration refused to admit European Jewish immigrants into the country.<sup>37</sup>

After the tour of the museum, students in middle school are shown a shortened version of the film "Escape from Sobibor" about the death camp in Poland which was the site of the largest prisoner escape of WWII. High school students watch a revised version of the documentary entitled "Auschwitz: If You Cried, You Died," which ties the Holocaust in with present day events. Older students are also urged to see the play put on by a semi-professional acting troupe from Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania entitled "Dear Esther" that the GHMEC sponsors once or twice a year. It is a true story about a Holocaust survivor, Esther Raab, who escaped from the Nazi death camp Sobibor and has been living in Vineland, New Jersey, since the end of the war. The play is followed by a question and answer session that Esther herself, or her son, attends. Museum organizers also sponsor a trip to the United States Holocaust Museum for students in grades eleven and twelve.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Goodwin Museum Exhibit's Narrative**

According to public historian Edward Linenthal, curators working in a history museum normally have a specific narrative in mind and design an exhibit according to that particular story. As in many history museums, the permanent exhibition "appears as a seamless tale, presenting the story through an anonymous voice that conceals those who shaped the exhibition," where "visitors will... not think about the exhibition as a narrated interpretation of one particular past, but will be satisfied that major interpretive dilemmas have been resolved..."<sup>39</sup> Visitors thus are not given the opportunity to establish their own interpretations and come up with their own conclusions with the evidence presented to them. The Goodwin Holocaust Museum, the largest such museum in the Delaware Valley, which houses a permanent exhibition including a collection of historical artifacts donated by local residents, memorabilia, and photographs as well as rotating and special exhibits, is supposed to be a simplified and smaller version of the United States

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<sup>37</sup> Helen Kirschbaum, interview by author, 28 October 2004. To learn more about American policy concerning Jews during the Second World War see David S. Wyman's *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1942-1945* (New York, 1984).

<sup>38</sup> Helen Kirschbaum, interview by author, 28 October 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Linenthal, 168.

Holocaust Museum designed mainly for students.<sup>40</sup> The Washington Museum, which opened four years prior in 1993 served as the prototype for the Goodwin Museum for several reasons. One stemmed from the majority of the American public hailing the national museum as a success; therefore, other Holocaust museums could legitimately use it as a model. Another reason was that Gerhard Vogel, who had helped with the Washington museum's exhibit, assisted in designing the Goodwin Museum's permanent exhibition. A final reason probably had to do with the fact that Richard Goodwin wanted to honor those servicemen who had liberated the camps since his father had served during the war.

The main purpose of the Washington museum was to commemorate the Holocaust which had directly and indirectly touched the lives of so many American Jews, thousands of whom had emigrated to the U.S. after the war.<sup>41</sup> Members of both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities however, questioned the existence of a Holocaust museum on American soil. They asked whether America could legitimately tell the story of the Holocaust and include it within its own history. The museum was "caught on the cusp of happened here/happened there, a conundrum...over whether American history means events happening here or the histories Americans carry with them."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, members of the Jewish community worried that all of the recent focus on the Holocaust would eclipse all of "the rich history of Judaism as a civilization."<sup>43</sup> Thus, the only knowledge non-Jews would have of Jewish history would be of Jews as victims of genocide. The existence of a national memorial, however, was justified by Jews' anxiety about the denial of the events of the Holocaust and its moral significance for Americans. According to the museum's director, Michael Berenbaum, the museum would serve to help the Jewish community "perpetuate the memory of those who died and ensure that people don't forget what happened to both the dead and the survivors." So many survivors have explained that they "wanted to survive so as to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell [their] story." The national museum was at the forefront of recognizing the responsibility of future generations to remember and to bear witness.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Helen Kirschbaum, interview by author, 28 October 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Saidel, 7, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Dena Eber, and Arthur G. Neals, eds, *Memory and Representation* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001), 142.

<sup>43</sup> Linenthal, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Berenbaum, Michael, and Abraham J. Peck, eds, *The Holocaust and History* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1998), 808.

Moreover, in order to justify a national Holocaust Memorial Museum, which commemorates an event that occurred across the Atlantic Ocean, the exhibit was designed with an Americanized twist. The museum is located amongst national monuments on the Washington Mall, a place meant to enhance national pride and foster American collective identity and memory. The Holocaust museum would therefore require a narrative that would do the same. According to Dena Eber and Arthur Neals, “one of the museum’s central strategies is to relate American democracy with the Holocaust,” to “overlap...the perspective of the victims with that of the victors of WWII.”<sup>45</sup> By viewing the Holocaust through an American perspective, the national museum directly focuses on American troops, shown at the beginning and end of the exhibit, as heroes, on America as the liberator and savior of the Holocaust victims. This narrative assumes that America had entered the war in order to rescue Jews, which of course, was not the case. U.S. forces stumbled upon Nazi camps after fighting in a war with Germany that Hitler had declared first.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the narrative also assumes that America is a country where such genocide would never take place. The exhibit implicitly portrays America as the antithesis of Nazi Germany, the latter standing for everything that went against America’s ideology of equality, freedom, and human rights as represented in the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Independence. The project: “reinforce[s] ‘the ethical ideals of American political culture by presenting the negation of those ideals’ as well as our historical response to them.”<sup>47</sup>

Many scholars argue, however, that it is necessary for the museum to have such a narrative so that an American audience can relate to the events of the Holocaust. The museum “*must engage* U.S. viewers with an ethical narrative of national identity in direct relation to the Holocaust. The alternative is to risk becoming a site for viewing the travails of the exoticized other from elsewhere (once upon a time), or even worse, a museum of natural history for an endangered species.”<sup>48</sup> Also, the museum presents complexities which reveal that America can count itself among the many bystanders while Jews overseas were being persecuted. The exhibit explains how the anti-Semitism that existed in America at the

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<sup>45</sup> Eber and Neals, 142.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Norton, “Yes and No to the Holocaust Museums”, *Commentary* (August 1993): 23.

<sup>47</sup> Eber and Neals, 142. Even though the U.S. tried to distance itself with Nazi Germany as much as possible, it should be remembered that the United States had established Japanese internment camps during the war, although these were not created with the intention of killing their prisoners.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

time resulted in the countries suppression of information regarding what was happening in Europe and its unwillingness to offer assistance to Jewish victims. Two events in particular are discussed. One is the story of the *SS St. Louis* which carried 500 Jews trying to immigrate to America in the spring of 1939. Because the U.S., like many other countries suffering from the depression, had established immigration quotas, the State Department refused to allow the ship to dock and it was sent back to Europe. Only 50 of the 500 passengers survived the war; most were immediately sent to Nazi death camps. Another issue-highly contested amongst historians- which docents discuss concerns the refusal of the U.S. military to bomb Auschwitz in May 1944 even as planes were bombing oil refineries a few miles away. Many historians argue that it could have possibly saved thousands of lives.<sup>49</sup>

Like the national museum, the Goodwin exhibit uses a specific narrative that “Americanizes” the Holocaust. Using former American troops who liberated camps to speak to students reveals the importance of the American component of the Holocaust in the museum. However, because the Goodwin Museum does not face the pressures that the United States Holocaust Museum as a national museum does, the museum coordinators place more emphasis on the Holocaust as an event resulting from hatred and prejudice. They assert that the repression of hate and bigotry could help significantly in preventing future genocides.

With these contexts in mind, the Goodwin exhibit, like the national museum, is organized into three chapters: “Nazi Assault 1933-1939,” “Final Solution 1940-1945,” and “Last Chapter,” with artifacts and photographs appropriate for each section. Curators, however, had to design the displays with their audience in mind; in the Goodwin Museum’s case the majority of visitors are children. The function of artifacts and photographs aspires to make each segment come alive. Curators at the Washington museum wanted “to personalize the Holocaust so visitors wouldn’t be overwhelmed by numbers.” The use of photographs in the national museum was of vital importance since “photos [have] the weightier task of restoring identity and individuality to the otherwise anonymous victims of the Holocaust.”<sup>50</sup> The Goodwin museum utilizes many artifacts donated by survivors who live in the surrounding area. Some of these artifacts include luggage from the *St. Louis*, burned fragments of the Torah, a prisoner’s uniform, a banjo, IDs,

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<sup>49</sup>Eber and Neals, 143-4. To learn more about this issue see Wyman’s *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1942-1945* (New York, 1984).

<sup>50</sup> See Linenthal, 171-189.

whips and clubs used by camp guards, metal bowls and crude implements prisoners used for their meager meals, and hate literature promulgated by the Nazis. The Goodwin museum also displays photographs, especially those taken of children before and after the war so that students can further relate to one million of the Holocaust's victims. The museum does not, however, display any graphic pictures of victims, including sickly-looking children in the ghettos and camps, as well as images of the dead. Initially the museum did include pictures of the dead, but they were shortly removed out of consideration for its audience.

Taking the student audience into consideration, what is shown in each section of the Goodwin Museum, is a simplified version of what is displayed in the Washington exhibit. Many complex issues that the national museum recognizes are not revealed in the Goodwin Museum. This is also a result of the size of the museum. The museum is rather small, consisting of just one large room, so there is not enough space for an in-depth exhibit. In the Goodwin Museum, the first chapter focuses on Hitler's rise to power and the numerous anti-Jewish laws that the government enacted during those years. Docents discuss the development of such laws to show students that the Nazi government did not make Jews non-citizens or force Jews into ghettos overnight. They explain that it was a gradual process that could have been prevented. Docents also reveal that Germans acted as the main perpetrators and bystanders during the Holocaust. They explain that the German people elected Hitler to lead the country in 1933, relatively aware of his intentions regarding Jews. Hitler had set out his goals in his book *Mein Kampf*, a book, docents explain, that every German household was forced to own. Also in this section, docents explain that Jews attempted to immigrate but were excluded everywhere, including the United States, the self-proclaimed "immigrant nation." Through the story of the *SS St. Louis*, docents reveal that American anti-Semitism had caused America to initially act as a bystander to the Holocaust.

The next section spanning the years 1940-1945 focuses on the ghettos, camps and the Final Solution. As in the Washington museum, the Goodwin exhibit also recognizes victims of the Holocaust other than Jews, including Sinti and Roma (gypsies), homosexuals, and political prisoners. A unique part in this section includes prints of drawings done by a child in the infamous Terezin camp. The camp, located in Prague, was where many Jewish professors and artists, writers, and musicians were sent. The Nazi leaders of the camp allowed prisoners to engage in extra-curricular activities that were not allowed in any other camps. The

prisoners, many of whom included children, took part in plays, operas, concerts, and art classes. These activities, however, were mostly façade. In reality, Terezin was used as a way station for its prisoners who were eventually shipped to Auschwitz. Moreover, thousands of Jews died in the Terezin camp from starvation. Of the tens of thousands of Jews who were taken to Terezin, 97,297 died, 15,000 of which were children. Only 132 of the children sent there were known to have survived.<sup>51</sup> Also, in this second section, Jewish pride is kindled with the museum's significant focus on Jewish resistance in the ghettos and camps, specifically, women resistors, to show visitors that not all Jews went to their deaths like "sheep being led to the slaughter."<sup>52</sup>

The third and final section includes a display on "Righteous Gentiles," those individuals that played a significant part in saving Jewish lives. Docents stress to students that if most people had not acted as bystanders during the war, then many more Jewish deaths could have been prevented. They give the example of Denmark, whose government and citizens, unwilling to discriminate against their fellow citizens, stood up against Germany. As a result, no Danish Jews were deported, and therefore, none died at the hands of the Nazis. Another section of the exhibit is dedicated to American troops who liberated the camps, and docents emphasize General Dwight D. Eisenhower's role in liberating the camps as well as his efforts to allow the whole world to bear witness to what had happened. Docents describe how his first action toward accomplishing this task, was forcing Germans who lived in surrounding towns to come to the camps to see the horrors of what had taken place in their midst. Eisenhower then forced them to help bury the dead. The final display also depicts the Nuremberg trials, and Holocaust survivors, especially those who emigrated to the United States and Palestine after the war.

The simplification of the history of the Holocaust, especially the "perhaps too- neat lexicon of perpetrators, bystanders, and victims" that is displayed (for instance, insinuating that the Holocaust's only perpetrators were Nazis which all Germans are portrayed as) due to factors such as the size of the museum and the audience that it is geared poses some problems.<sup>53</sup> Docents try to discuss some of these complicated

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<sup>51</sup> *Terezin (Terezienstadt)*, 2004, <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/terezin.html>> (28

November 2004).

<sup>52</sup> *Jewish Resistance* <<http://members.aol.com/Elyissb/index2.html>> (2 December 2004).

<sup>53</sup> Linenthal, 216.

issues with older students; however, each guide focuses on different issues for each tour. There are no texts discussing complexities in the display cases to make complicated issues a more permanent and concrete part of the exhibit which students could read about whether the docents chose to discuss them or not. This flaw however is not significantly detrimental since the museum's mission is not to give an in-depth historical account of the Holocaust, but to instead, emphasize the prejudice led to such atrocities. Although historians have shown that prejudice and hatred were not the only factors that resulted in the Holocaust, they did play a large part. The museum's mission to combat hatred by teaching students about prejudice and bigotry through the lens of the Holocaust is a realistic goal that coordinators seem to achieve. The 10,000 contacts that the museum has with schools and teachers in the tri-state area is a testament of the museum's success.

Although the Goodwin museum continues to be successful in its mission, like all museums, maintaining the proper funding is a constant battle. Kirschbaum explained how funding is a "*big issue*" since the education program and the museum are self-sustaining. Most people are unaware that the museum and its programs are not funded by the Jewish Federation, or memberships to the JCC; it is only funded through museum memberships and private gifts. Kirschbaum is discouraged, feeling that not enough JCC members become members of the museum to help support the program. Because of a lack of funding, Kirschbaum often sets up fundraising programs, applies for grants, and is always urging people to become members of the museum.<sup>54</sup> Although Kirschbaum's efforts have been able to keep the amount of money for school trips to the museum at a minimum, this is often not enough. She noted with disappointment in the recent increase in the number of schools, especially those located in Philadelphia, that do not have the ability to travel to the museum due to budget restraints.<sup>55</sup>

Despite some funding issues, the Goodwin museum and education center has fulfilled the functions of contemporary museums as centers of education and public service.<sup>56</sup> The museum does more than simply commemorate and preserve the memory of those whom it affected. It also tries to improve the quality of people's lives by striving to curb prejudice.

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<sup>54</sup> Helen Kirschbaum, interview by author, 28 October 2004.

<sup>55</sup> As previously mentioned, however, the center offers teachers and schools several ways in which it can bring Holocaust education to the school.

<sup>56</sup> Discussion of museums as centers of education and public service can be found in Stephen Weil's book *Making Museum's Matter* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002)



Museum coordinators do not want students to see the Holocaust as a distant and unfamiliar event that occurred in a vacuum. Objects of the Holocaust are displayed not only for the sake of preservation without any educational function: the museum is not a “cemetery of bric-a-brac,” but rather, coordinators have molded the past so that students can relate to it.<sup>57</sup> Students are aware of prejudice when they visit the museum, and therefore are more apt to develop an understanding of the Holocaust. Specifically in Holocaust museums, because the event is so difficult to grasp, scholars have argued that “rather than communicating new information...the greatest strengths of [these] museums may be in confirming, reinforcing, and extending the existing beliefs of their visitors.”<sup>58</sup> Although it is difficult to know exactly what visitors take away from their experience at a museum, Kirschbaum feels that the education program that has been developed at the center is a very effective one in fulfilling its mission to teach children about the Holocaust as well as relating the event as a result of prejudice and hate to their present day lives. Kirschbaum noted that often students write to her after their visit and comment about their worthwhile experiences, and how they came away from it with a much greater understanding of the Holocaust and its lessons, especially from listening to a survivor’s story. The museum’s numerous efforts to serve society deserve recognition. In order to continue its valuable mission, however, coordinators need to constantly make the public aware of the museum’s enormous significance in maintaining the memory of the Holocaust as well as teaching its lessons that are pertinent for the present and the future.

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<sup>57</sup> Weil, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Weil, 69-70.

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